

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 1444

LIMDIS

FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, PFOR, MILI, MO

SUBJECT: REUTERS REPORT OF U.S. MILITARY SALES TO MOROCCO

REF: RABAT 1403, MONTVILLE/COON TELCON MARCH 21.

1. I MET GENERAL MOULAY HAFID, MINISTER OF ROYAL PROTOCOL, ON MARCH 20 AT 1700 AT HIS OFFICE IN ROYAL PALACE. THE GENERAL, PRESUMABLY SPEAKING FOR KING HASSAN, AS IS HIS USUAL PRACTICE, ASKED IF I HAD READ REUTERS REPORT IN THAT DAY'S L'OPINION REFERRING TO MOROCCAN PURCHASE OF 3 TYPES OF EQUIPMENT TOTALING SOME \$145 MILLION. WHEN I ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY HE ASKED FOR AN EXPLANATION. I INFORMED HIM THAT, IMMEDIATELY UPON READING THIS ITEM, WE HAD CONTACTED WASHINGTON. I TOLD HIM WE HAD BEEN INFORMED THAT EARLIER IN WEEK, ROUTINE MENTION HAD BEEN MADE DURING DOD PRESS BRIEFING OF FACT THREE LETTERS OF OFFER HAD BEEN FORWARDED TO GONGRESS FOR APPROVAL. I DESCRIBED RECENT LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENT TO DO THIS AND NOTED APPARENT ADMINISTRATIVE ERROR IN INCLUDING MENTION OF LETTER OF OFFER FOR TRUCKS EVEN THOUGH THAT HAD BEEN OVERTAKEN BY GOM DECISION PURCHASE DIRECT FROM COMMERCIAL SUPPLIER.

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2. I EXPRESSED MY REGRET TO GENERAL MOULAY HAFID THAT INFORMATION REGARDING OUR MILITARY SALES PROGRAM TO MOROCCO HAD THUS COME OUT WITHOUT PREVIOUS COORDINATION WITH GOM, AND THAT INFORMATION RELEASED BY DOD HAD BEEN FACTUALLY INACCURATE.

3. GENERAL HEARD ME OUT COURTEOUSLY BUT REMINDED ME OF MY REQUEST TO GOM, WHICH I HAD TRANSMITTED UNDER MY GOVERNMENT'S INSTRUCTIONS, THAT PUBLICITY SHOULD BE HANDLED PRUDENTLY IN VIEW OF USG DELICATE RELATIONS WITH SPAIN. GOM HAD FULLY APPRECIATED USG PROBLEM AND HAD THEREFORE ACTED WITH UTMOST DISCRETION. MANNER AND STYLE OF ANNOUNCEMENT WAS THEREFORE REMARKABLE. SEEING MY OBVIOUS DISCOMFITURE, GENERAL BROUGHT SUBJECT TO A CLOSE BY SAYING IN PICTURESQUE SOLDIER'S FRENCH SOMETHING LIKE: "WELL, EVERY GOVERNMENT HAS SOME SOB WHO DOES NOT KNOW WHICH END IS UP."

4. COMMENT: FOREGOING SPEAKS FOR ITSELF AND I THINK IT UNNECESSARY TO ELABORATE FOR WASHINGTON'S BENEFIT INFERENCES TO BE DRAWN REGARDING NECESSITY FOR BETTER COORDINATION OF THESE MATTERS IN THE FUTURE. I MIGHT ADD THAT SO FAR GOM APPARENTLY CONTINUES DESPITE TM S CONTRETEMPS, TO HANDLE ITS END OF AFFAIR WITH "UTMOST DELICACY". A LEAST, NO FURTHER PLAY OF REUTER TIGAZ, IN COMMENT THEREON, HAS APPEARED IN EITHER ARABIC OR FRENCH LANGUAGE PRESS SO FAR. EPISODE SEEMS TO HAVE BLOWN OVER AT THIS END, WHICH IS JUST AS WELL, AS PROBLEM I HAVE DESCRIBED WITH PALACE WOULD HAVE BEEN COMPOUNDED HAD WE BEEN UNDER PRESSURE TO TAKE POSITION WITH LOCAL MEDIA ON REPORT THAT WAS OFFICIAL, INACCURATE, AND UNTIMELY.
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